



Meeting with the City of Racine
Tuesday, August 24, 2004, 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

People in attendance

Jim Blazek, City of Racine
Matt Sadowsha, City of Racine
John Rooney, City of Racine
Michael Glasheen, City of Racine
Rick Jones, City of Racine

Doug Dalton, WisDOT
Casey Newman, WisDOT
Ethan Johnson, WisDOT
Jonquil Johnston, WisDOT

- 1) Overview of WisDOT's meeting purpose and WisDOT's long-range plan, *Connections 2030*, by WisDOT staff: The meeting began at 10:00 with introductions. Casey Newman, WisDOT, gave an overview of WisDOT's long-range plan *Connections 2030*. WisDOT is seeking input on transportation planning issues from larger Wisconsin cities at this point. *Connections 2030* is scheduled to be completed in 2006.
- 2) Gathering of input from City of Racine: Staff from the City of Racine discussed the following:

Funding

The City of Racine staff stated their concerns about reduced transportation funds. Maintaining existing transportation facilities needs to be a funding priority. Local aids, particularly lift bridge aids, are critical to Racine's operating budget. Aid reductions in recent years have created budget issues for the City of Racine. Racine also relies on transit and general highway aids from the state. Racine would like to see more funding incentives for regional and cooperative transportation projects.

Growth

Two former towns adjacent to the City of Racine – Caledonia and Mount Pleasant – have since incorporated as villages. Annexation of new territory is not possible for the City of Racine. Therefore, the City has put energy into redevelopment projects. The City envisions Racine as a tourist destination, with Lake Michigan and the marinas as major attractions. Racine has a large number of boat slips in their marinas that could be attractive to people from the surrounding areas. Racine has a number of other attractions such as museums and festivals that the City would like to promote and expand. They also see opportunities to attract conventions. The downtown streetscape recently underwent a facelift with assistance from federal Transportation Enhancement money.

Racine's population has declined over the last few decades. The City has experienced a decline in per capita income, an increase in the unemployment rate, and the departure of major industries. The 1970 population was 95,000. In 2004, the population is 80,500. The City also believes Racine has the possibility for residential growth, as an option for people from northern Illinois and the Milwaukee area looking for more affordable housing and also for people looking for summer homes near the marinas. A number of warehouses have been converted to residential lofts and there are other condominium projects in the downtown area, which have done well on the market.

The key to making Racine attractive for tourist activity and residential relocation is an efficient transportation system. The City of Racine stated they need improved access to the Interstate and commuter rail. Improved access to the Interstate will require intergovernmental coordination of traffic light timing with adjacent towns. Racine would like to be part of the decision-making process for access and traffic operation decisions on routes leading into Racine, particularly State Highways 38, 31, 20, 11 and County K.

In addition to tourist and residential development, the City of Racine sees opportunities to redevelop industrial brownfields that are already equipped with infrastructure. They would like to see businesses locate to their industrial park.

Interstate Access

Access to the Interstate from the City of Racine is critical to keeping current businesses and industry in the City and also for drawing new business, industry, and residents. Several industries have relocated their offices to other communities because Racine does not have quick access to the Interstate. Racine believes this could be solved through traffic signal coordination, access management, and congestion management. The City of Racine staff support timed signals and limited access along main highways and arterials, but feel they have no voice in those issues outside of the city limits. City of Racine staff also suggested that part of the problem with access to the Interstate is that the city's smaller, neighboring communities do not have the technical expertise to properly set traffic signal timing or to manage snow removal effectively. Commuter rail and/or more regional transit options might alleviate some congestion on roads leading to the Interstate. Improved access to the Interstate is critical to the City of Racine's vision for the community to become a tourist destination and for the City to offer an affordable housing alternative to Chicago and Milwaukee.

Commuter Rail and Transit

The City of Racine staff advocated for the establishment of commuter rail in their community. They see many development and revitalization opportunities resulting from easy transit connections to Chicago and Milwaukee. They encourage the establishment of a Chicago Metra link and regional coordination and/or management of transit, in general. They believe that the state should take the lead in developing the commuter rail line.

Amtrak service is available on the Hiawatha line in near-by Sturtevant, however, the City of Racine staff stated this service is expensive and the station is in need of repair. They see the Hiawatha as serving day-to-day business travel, but not really the population needs of the City of Racine, as commuter rail would. They noted that Racine residents often drive to Kenosha to board Metra trains to get to Chicago. They also noted that transit access to the Sturtevant Amtrak station is insufficient, and that the Village of Sturtevant has been unwilling to help pay for improved transit service.

The City of Racine recently invested in a new transit center. Staff also noted the transit center is currently undergoing an economic development study. The consultant of the study has stated that a new transit center by itself is not enough to promote residential and commercial development near the center. Commuter rail must be part of the mix.

They see an opportunity to create a multi-modal transportation hub. The City of Racine staff noted this would require more regional coordination. Currently, the transit systems in the area are operated independently. The City staff advocated for linkages between the independent systems or creating one larger transit system. One transit system would allow for economies of scale savings and improved travel times. They see a need for public transportation options to Caledonia and Mount Pleasant. Racine staff noted it could make sense to merge Racine's and Kenosha's transit system.

Racine has considered the idea of passenger ferry service, however Southeastern Wisconsin could not support two cross-lake ferry services. On the other hand, ferry service between Milwaukee, Racine and Chicago may have some potential. For ferry service to be feasible in Racine the river would need to be dredged if the ferry dock were on the river. There would need to be a lot of infrastructure investments if the ferry docked on the lakeshore.

Racine staff supported a dedicated revenue source for transit and also a regional transit authority responsible for commuter rail and transit service in Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha Counties.

Intergovernmental Coordination

Racine staff noted they would like to see increased coordination in the transportation decision-making process. They stated there are often projects outside of their jurisdiction, particularly along the Interstate corridor, that directly impact the City's transportation flow and economy for which they do not have a vote or a voice. The City staff support regional decision-making and coordination on various scales: southeastern Wisconsin, the Chicago metropolitan area, and within Racine County. State agencies, in particular, need to consider the parties they invite to the decision-making table when improvements are made. The state also needs to consider developing incentives that would promote regional cooperation. Racine stated their desire to see all communities impacted by a project invited rather than only the communities in whose jurisdictions include the projects. Racine staff noted intergovernmental cooperation is particularly critical because many of the developing areas do not have the technical expertise to manage intersections and traffic signal operations.